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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: COUNTERINSURGENCY PAST AND
PRESENT AT RTA WAR COLLEGE

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan Sutton, reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)
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SUMMARY

11. (C) On February 26-27, the Strategic Society Club (SSC), Strategic Research and Development Department, Institute of Advanced Military Studies, Royal Thai Army (RTA), conducted a symposium "Counterinsurgency (COIN) Past and Present" with the RTA War College, Command and General Staff College, and invited foreign experts. The symposium focus upon COIN strategy and operational art served to assist Thai national leaders develop appropriate strategies toward successful government action in southern Thailand. This cable captures the views, concerns, and suggestions of two Thai officials on southern insurgency issues. END SUMMARY.

ANALYSIS OF ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT EFFORT

12. (C) Two primary speakers, Chulalongkorn Professor Panitan Wattanayakorn--a close contact of ours and a security adviser to Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont--and COL Boonrod Srisomabat--senior instructor in special operations department in the Army--analyzed the Thaksin and Surayud Royal Thai Government's (RTG) approach to the complex and sensitive southern insurgency issue. Panitan and Boonrod noted three sources of failure under Thaksin's leadership:

1A. MISCALCULATING THE PROBLEMS IN SOUTH AS CRIMINAL RATHER THAN INSURGENCY: Thaksin mistakenly identified drugs, illegal smuggling and organized crime as the sense of the violence in the south. "His heavy handed approach at Krue Sae mosque and Tak-Bai are examples where he failed to address the counterinsurgency issue" yet insisted that he would "not give an inch of Thai soil to separatist". Boonrod characterized the dissolution of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center and the Civilian-Police-Military Combined Force 43 by Thaksin as when "the wheel began to come off in terms of order and security throughout the region".

1B. LACK OF GOVERNANCE: Thaksin's CEO style of government treated the bureaucratic system as a business and the citizens of the south as consumers. This lack of structured security, governance, and communication at the national and local levels led to corruption, mismanagement, and failed businesses, adding to the instability in the south.

¶C. IMPATIENCE: Thaksin's inability to make up his mind on issues was apparent with his transfer of government positions in the south every three to six months. Unity of command was chaotic among the military, police and civilian authority under Thaksin. As an example, Boonrod cited the Sept 2005 Ton-Yong-Limo incident where the Royal Thai Navy lost two officers during a hostage situation because there was not a clear chain of command. Surayud and RTA Command-in-Chief Sonthi Boonyaratglin so far seem united in their approach towards reconciliation policy and a peaceful solution of "victory without war".

INSURGENT TACTICS

¶3. (C) Panitan expressed concern about the Feb 21 ambush against the Queen's aide, Thanpuying Viraya Chawakul's motorcade by the southern insurgents, pointing to it as marking a disturbing stage in their months-long terror campaign. According to Panitan, the insurgents have adopted new strategies, taking their operations to downtown areas and hitting economic targets such as those in Yala's Betong district. Panitan noted strategically the insurgents want to demonstrate they can attack the same targets they have in the past while proving to be well-organized with enough force and firepower to combat the authorities head-on. Currently, they tend to aim for Sino-Thai targets with symbolic meaning to Buddhists, zeroing in on occasions such as Chinese New Year, the Buddhist Makha Bucha Day, and Songkran. He was quick to note the alarming increase in deaths from the violence in February this year.

¶4. (C) While militants use terror tactics to deter locals from cooperating with authorities, Panitan believes that they

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also want to force the government to resort to violence. He believes the insurgents fear the government's peaceful approach is gaining more support among locals. By committing acts of violence, the insurgents hope to force the RTG to overreact and resort to extreme action against them. With the well publicized increase in soldiers posted to the south, Panitan suspects the insurgents are expanding their activities in other areas and broadening their tactics to take advantage of the delay in moving 30 new RTA companies into the region.

SUGGESTIONS

¶5. (C) Boonrod and Panitan outlined several practical suggestions for the RTA:

- Troops should avoid being heavy-handed and seek cooperation from Malaysia in subduing violence.
- Fast-deployment units should be set up, with troops trained to carry out peace making, and peace enforcement missions.
- Design less intimidating uniforms to sport a new image as peace advocates.
- Establish short-term commanding headquarters in other southern provinces to improve command and control, using lessons learned from the headquarter's in Narathiwat which has given the security forces a better ability to drive insurgents out of the province.
- Reorganize government structures to improve integration of military tactical action plans, police, rule of law, and local governance.
- Build a network of connections with the Southern Border Provinces Administration Center and the local people to gain their trust before the next elections. The center must make sure locals will not be "forced" to vote for the disguised insurgents.
- Allocate appropriate management and budget to accelerate the deployment of 30 new RTA companies by April.
- Continue Surayud's offensive political policy of "winning the hearts and minds" of the Muslims in the south.
- Provide a clear chain of command from the Internal

Security Operations Command (ISOC) to the Regional Internal Security Operations Command.

6.(C) Panitan also cautioned against current proposals involving the integration of village scouts. (Note: The village scouts are uniformed irregulars let by RTA officers. While boosting RTA manpower in troubled areas, we have some concerns about their discipline and effectiveness. End Note) He strongly advocated that mobilizing village scouts to counter infiltration of insurgents would be too dangerous. The situation might spin out of control and culminate in civil war. The security forces would then play into the hands of the militants, who want the government to be seen as losing control of the situation, prompting military intervention by the UN--or others.

BOYCE